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1-1-1999

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Recommended Citation

Bushman, Richard L. "Was Joseph Smith a Gentleman? The Standard for Refinement in Utah," in *Nearly Everything Imaginable: The Everyday Life of Utah's Mormon Pioneers* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), 27-46.

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WAS JOSEPH SMITH A GENTLEMAN?

THE STANDARD FOR REFINEMENT IN UTAH

Richard Lyman Bushman

Frances Trollope, mother of the novelist Anthony Trollope, came to America in 1827 with her husband, a failed barrister and farmer, to open a fancy-goods shop in Cincinnati. While her husband kept shop, Frances traveled about the country, observing the American scene. After still another business failure, the Trollopes returned to England, and in 1836 Frances Trollope published *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*. Although it was an immediate hit in England and was subsequently translated into French and Spanish, the book infuriated readers in the United States. Everywhere Mrs. Trollope looked, she had found vulgarity, which she depicted in broad, humorous strokes. On the steamboat that carried the Trollopes up the Mississippi from New Orleans, the respectable passengers dined together in what was called “the gentleman’s cabin,” a compartment “handsomely fitted up, and the latter well carpeted,” she said, “but oh! that carpet! I will not, I may not describe its condition. . . . I hardly know any annoyance so deeply repugnant to English feelings, as the incessant, remorseless spitting of Americans.” Her feelings were equally riled by the table manners of the so-called gentlemen, who included among their number a judge and men with the titles of general, colonel, and major.

The total want of all the usual courtesies of the table, the voracious rapidity with which the viands were seized and devoured, the strange uncouth phrases and pronunciation; the loathsome spitting, from the contamination of which it was absolutely impossible to protect our dresses; the frightful manner of feeding with their knives, till the whole blade seemed to enter into the mouth; and the still more frightful manner of cleaning the teeth afterwards with a pocket knife, soon forced us to feel that . . . the dinner hour was to be any thing rather than an hour of enjoyment.

Ordinary people appeared still more degraded to her eyes: "All the little towns and villages" seen from the deck of the steamboat were "wretched-looking in the extreme. . . . I never witnessed human nature reduced so low, as it appeared in the wood-cutters' huts on the unwholesome banks of the Mississippi." She was surprised to find that the mayor of Memphis was "a pleasing gentleman-like man"; to her he seemed "strangely misplaced in a little town on the Mississippi."¹

Trollope wrote with an ideological grudge. She candidly announced in the preface that in describing "the daily aspect of ordinary life, she has endeavoured to shew how greatly the advantage is on the side of those who are governed by the few, instead of the many." In other words, aristocratic England had it all over democratic America. She wanted her countrymen to see "the jarring tumult and universal degradation which invariably follow the wild scheme of placing all the power of the state in the hands of the populace."² But if ideology gave a special edge to her writing, her standard for measuring democratic degradation was by no means unique. Travelers from France and Spain, from New England, Philadelphia, and New York—virtually everyone who ventured into the western portions of the country—asked Trollope's question: how civilized were the inhabitants of the new regions? Though the answers varied, the question was the same. Where did the manners of the people put them on the scale of civilization? Were they ladies and gentlemen or barbarians?

The West came under particular scrutiny because of the common belief that civilization fell away as one ventured farther into the wilderness, the home of the savage tribes. Easterners feared that civilized manners were stripped from migrants to the unsettled frontier, reducing them slowly but surely to barbarism. In other words, history reversed itself as people migrated west; they returned to the primitive condition of humanity before civilization had developed. Horace Bushnell, the illustrious Congregational preacher and theologian in Hartford, Connecticut, delivered a despairing sermon on the West entitled "Barbarism the First Danger."³

Sermons like Bushnell's made clear that the measurement of civilization in the West was of more than academic interest. In a democratic nation where power is in the hands of the populace, the western states were in danger of coming under the control of barbarians who would not only govern their own regions but send representatives to the Congress of the United States. Reports that guests at Andrew Jackson's 1829 inaugural stood in muddy boots on damask chairs

and generally trashed the White House sent terror through the civilized East. Jackson seemed to head the vanguard of western barbarians taking power in the nation's capital. Josiah Quincy, the Bostonian who later visited Nauvoo, said of General Jackson's administration that it "swept away much of the graceful etiquette which was characteristic of the society as I saw it." In the face of the onslaught, "social barriers" were demolished "by the unrefined and coarse."⁴

The question of refinement cut even more deeply in Utah in the early days when the governance of the territory was at issue. The Latter-day Saints worked with a double handicap in striving to win respect from eastern travelers: in addition to the usual doubts about civilization in the West, the visitors were skeptical about Mormon religious fanaticism. Travelers came expecting that the poor credulous fools who submitted to the rule of Brigham Young would lack education, manners, taste, and intelligence—in short, would be as degraded as the woodcutters Trollope sighted along the banks of the Mississippi. The Saints for their part had a lot at stake in proving the travelers wrong. If they could not persuade visitors of their religious beliefs, the Mormons at least wanted to demonstrate their refinement. Besides respect from eastern cultural centers, control over their government hung in the balance. William Warner Major's fanciful portrait of Brigham Young sitting amid columns and elegant furnishings, every inch the polished gentleman, epitomized the campaign to demonstrate Mormon refinement (fig. 1).

This cultural struggle affected the way early Utahns presented themselves to the world and the way history has been written ever since. From the mid-nineteenth century on, Mormons in telling their story have emphasized cultural respectability. The history of "refinement in the wilderness," as this narrative might be called, has appeared in formal histories and been elaborated in Mormon folktales. The history succeeds because it does rest on a factual base. Like the "suffering pioneer" narrative of Utah history, real stories can be told in support of this point of view. We have accounts of pioneers eating crickets and of water dripping from sod roofs to prove the pioneers really did suffer. We also have records of barrels of fine china being carried across the plains to show that the Mormon settlers brought civilization to barren Utah. The Daughters of Utah Pioneers museum is an impressive monument to this history—the story of a refined and enlightened people driven to the West, where they reestablished civilization in the desert.

Although the story of Utah refinement is myth in the good sense of

being an overarching story that grew from people's view of the world as well as from the reality of their lives, it is a myth with truth to it. My own grandmother, largely a twentieth-century person to be sure, started life sewing overalls in a ZCMI factory, and yet on her husband's salary as a shoe salesman, she turned her house on the lower avenues in Salt Lake City into a tiny palace of taste and homemade beauty. She not only believed the civilization-in-the-wilderness myth, she lived by it, changing the material conditions of her life to conform to the story.

This mingling of myth and reality means that historians should not disregard these traditional narratives and try to replace them with their own versions of the "truth" based on supposedly hardheaded research. We do not want to demolish a narrative that has proven so fruitful, but rather to test its limitations and develop its analytical power. We can usefully ask, for example, how civilization-in-the-wilderness history accounts for the large portion of the population that did not live by this myth so far as we can see. George Anderson's photos, while documenting much refinement, also inform us that gentility did not prevail everywhere in Utah, even by the 1890s. People lived in shacks as well as mansions, and we can imagine that still more shabbily dressed people lived in crude cabins in rough and tough areas of the state where Anderson never ventured.

In the unadulterated refinement-in-the-wilderness narrative, these rough Utahns are often looked on as unfinished Latter-day Saints on whom the gospel had not yet worked its refining influence. In time, the uplifting spirit of the Mormon religion, plus a little prosperity, would civilize crude farmers and turn their cabins into comfortable and refined houses. Refinement, in other words, was thought to be the natural destiny of good Mormons, an integral part of Latter-day Saint culture. Besides entering into Utah through middle-class American culture, refinement came to Utah through Mormon religious beliefs. In this view, "everything virtuous, lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy" in the thirteenth article of faith must refer to good manners, decorated houses, well-kept gardens, and handsome clothes—the marks of refinement. The improvement of domestic manners and beautification of houses and yards was an aspect of personal salvation, as I think my grandmother surely believed, so that every good Mormon was on the way to becoming genteel.

If refinement was part of the religion, the foundations would have been laid down by Joseph Smith in Kirtland and Nauvoo, where Mormon culture was born. In those places, the fundamentals for most of later Mormonism were constructed. The city plans of the early Mor-



Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art

FIG. 1. William Warner Major (1804–1854), *Brigham and Mary Ann Angell Young and Their Children* (1845–1851). Oil on board, 25" x 33". This painting elevates Brigham Young to the status of a refined country gentleman. The typical standard of refinement in Utah, however, was less opulent.

mon gathering places in the East, for example, were models for Salt Lake City and other Utah towns with their wide streets, square blocks, and town house lots for farmers. The precedents for genteel living should have been established at the same time. If refinement was basic, Joseph Smith would have spoken of it and what is more lived by it. Hence the relevance of the question: Was Joseph Smith a gentleman?

The modern depictions of Joseph Smith rarely show him as anything but a gentleman. With few exceptions, he appears in high collar with white stock and a dark suit (fig. 2); the only contemporaneous picture shows him in the uniform of a general. We can scarcely conceive of him otherwise, because if not a gentleman he would have been coarse, hardly a fitting character for a religious leader. The natural inclination today is to think that refinement and religion must intermingle. Living in a century when the American middle class has absorbed the standards of genteel culture, we have trouble imagining that gentility could ever be considered alien to true religion.

In the eighteenth century, however, before the middle class as we

know it had come into existence, gentility was thought of as a sinful extravagance for the population as a whole, best left to the gentry and the European aristocracy. Benjamin Franklin felt guilty about replacing a plain earthenware bowl with chinaware for his breakfast bread and milk, and he chided plain workmen who tried to appear like gentlemen by living beyond their means.⁵ Lorenzo Dow, the great evangelist after whom Brigham Young's brother was named, made fun of all genteel practices. Dancing schools came right out of Babylon, Dow said, and were actually little more than places "where people were taught 'the important art of hopping and jumping about.'" He condemned the promoters of "Polite Literature" in the form of romances and novels, which caused people to neglect the Bible. Peter Cartwright, a pioneer Methodist preacher in the first half of the nineteenth century, told of a fashionably dressed man who could not find forgiveness until "with his hands he deliberately opened his shirt bosom, took hold of his ruffles, tore them off, and threw them down in the straw; and in less than two minutes God blessed his soul."⁶ Writing in his memoirs in 1856, Cartwright mourned how Methodist simplicity had been lost as the century had gone on. He loved the early days when Methodists "dressed plain; attended their meetings faithfully, especially preaching, prayer and class meetings; they wore no jewelry, no ruffles," and "parents did not allow their children to go to balls or plays; they did not send them to dancing-schools."⁷ A good Methodist in other words was plain, not fancy, avoiding fashionable dress in the belief that gentility stood in the way of heartfelt religion.

Joseph Smith came out of that tradition. Before his visions set him on another course, he was "partial to the Methodist sect," at a time when plain living was still their way (JS—H 1:8). Emma was a Methodist, as were Brigham Young and many other early converts. They would have understood the passage in the revelation called "the law of the Church" that commanded the Saints to "let all thy garments be plain, and their beauty the beauty of the work of thine own hands" (D&C 42:40). Those words would have made sense to Joseph Smith, who did not grow up among genteel people. Not "well-bred" in the conventional sense of being reared as a gentleman, he was part of the mass of log-cabin people to whom the Whig politicians appealed in the log-cabin campaign of 1840. For the larger part of his boyhood, his parents, poor tenant farmers, resided among the lower ranks of the social order, the class of people that included Abraham Lincoln's family. The Smiths were dirt farmers, who worked with their hands at a time when genteel culture belonged to white-collar workers who



Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art

FIG. 2. Pino Drago (1947–), *Monday, 24 June 1844, 4:15 A.M.: Beyond the Events*, 1987. Oil on canvas, 56" x 47". In this modern painting, Joseph is depicted as a refined gentleman in genteel surroundings.

labored with their minds.

But the Smiths' lowly social position and Joseph's connection with the Methodists do not tell the whole story of his upbringing. Complicating this picture of a plain-folks family was the spread of middle-class gentility in the first decades of the nineteenth century, touching the lives of many farm people including Joseph Smith's mother. More attuned to cultural pressures than others in the family, Lucy Smith had social ambitions. Around 1819, when the Smiths finally got land of their own in Manchester after fourteen years of tenant farming, she hoped to find a place among the village middle class. Soon after they built their cabin, she happily accepted an invitation to take tea with "some wealthy merchants wives and the minister's lady." Her pleasure turned to chagrin, however, when one of the women innocently declared that "Mrs. [Smith] ought not to live in that log house of her's any longer she deserves a better fate." "Interpreting the comment as a slight," Lucy turned on the circle and excoriated the women for the failings of their husbands and children. Although the Smiths lived in a cabin, she wanted it known that they were the moral equals of anyone in town. As Lucy told the story, she came off the victor in this clash between moral values and gentility, and yet moral respectability was not enough for her. In the next entry, Lucy noted that "about this time we began to make preparations for building a house. The family hired a carpenter to construct a frame house with parlor and central hall," the classic design for middle-class genteel dwellings—even though the ensuing debt overwhelmed their resources and led to the loss of their farm.⁸ Lucy wanted a genteel house badly enough to stretch their resources to the breaking point.

Besides his mother's influence in rearing him, Joseph also came under the influence of genteel culture through a few of the early converts. Sidney Rigdon, though afforded only a common school education while he grew up on his father's farm in Pennsylvania, consumed books voraciously while preparing to be a Baptist preacher and retained everything. As the minister of a "respectable" Pittsburgh congregation, he was exposed to middle-class, urban values, which he brought with him into the LDS Church.⁹ Refinement was never a major theme of his preaching, but he did find a place for good manners and comely appearance. In an article called "The Saints and the World," published in the *Messenger and Advocate* in 1836, he outlined the work of building Zion and then posed a question: "Now let me ask the saints of the last days, what kind of people must you be, in order that you may accomplish so great a work?" How was Zion to

“become the joy and the praise of the whole earth, so that kings shall come to the brightness of her rising?” The people of Zion needed to shine. “Surely, it will be by her becoming more wise, more learned, more refined, and more noble, than the cities of the world, so that she becomes the admiration of the great ones of the earth.” Zion would attract attention “by the superiority of her literary institutions, and by a general effort of all the saints to patronize literature in our midst, so that the manners of the saints may be properly cultivated, and their habits correctly formed.” Besides the people themselves, “her buildings will have to be more elegant, her palaces more splendid, and her public houses more magnificent.” “Neither are we to leave out of the question,” Rigdon went on, “the dress of the saints, for this supplies a place also in effecting this great object; the beauty and neatness of their dress is characteristic of the degree of refinement, and decency of a society. The nobles of the earth would not be likely to admire disgraceful apparel, untastefully arranged.” Without all this, Zion could not become “the joy and praise of the whole earth.”¹⁰

Although a strong endorsement for refinement, Rigdon’s article fell short of making it an article of faith. He promoted correct manners, beautiful dress, and elegant buildings more as means to an end than as a basic value. His aim was to win the admiration and support of earthly powers, not to make the Saints over into ladies and gentlemen as a good in itself. In other moods, Mormon preachers could show their doubts about gentility. A *Times and Seasons* article in support of baptism by immersion expressed doubt about the willingness of refined people to get themselves wet all over. “Enlightened and refined society are not so vulgar as to go down into the water to be baptized. How ridiculously absurd it would be to lead one of the elite of the popular world, muffled in silks and satins, down into the dark waters of the great Mississippi.”¹¹ Lorenzo Dow’s and Peter Cartwright’s skepticism about fashionable people echoes in those sentences. An old-style ambivalence about gentility is found in Mormonism along with Rigdon’s enthusiasm. Refinement was at one moment a desirable polish to make the Saints shine in the world’s eyes and at another a worldly pride that hindered acceptance of the gospel.

How did Joseph Smith navigate these crosscurrents in Mormon culture? The eyewitness depictions of the Prophet show him in many lights but not usually as a standard polished gentleman. Some come close. Emily Partridge Young, one of Joseph’s wives, said, “He was all that the word *gentleman* would imply—pure in heart, always striving for right, upholding innocence, and battling for the good of all.”¹²

While attaching admirable qualities to the term “gentleman,” Emily Young said nothing about the fine manners usually connected to gentility. The Masonic grandmaster who came to Nauvoo in March 1842 for the installation of Masonic officers was surprised at the man he met. Instead of an “ignorant and tyrannical upstart,” Joseph Smith was “a sensible, intelligent, companionable and gentlemanly man.”¹³

Most observers agreed with the grandmaster that Joseph was “a fine-looking man,” but they did not consider him a gentleman. When Joel Hills Johnson met Joseph in 1831, the Prophet himself said, “I suppose you think that I am [a] great green, lubberly fellow,” and Johnson observed that the phrase “was an exact representation of his person, being large and tall and not having a particle of beard about his face.”¹⁴ A Vermont girl who saw him in Kirtland in 1833 said, “He would better have answered to the character of a ‘Davy Crockett,’ than to the leader of a band who professed to be followers of the Saviour of mankind.”¹⁵ Charlotte Haven, a girl from New Hampshire, lived in Nauvoo through most of 1843. Not a Mormon, she viewed the Prophet with a jaundiced eye. She saw “a large, stout man, youthful in his appearance, with light complexion and hair, and blue eyes set far back in the head,” making no note of either polish or crudity in his appearance. His speech was another matter. She had expected, she said, “to be overwhelmed by his eloquence” and was disappointed. He spoke in “a loud voice, and his language and manner were the coarsest possible. His object seemed to be to amuse and excite laughter in his audience.” By comparison, Sidney Rigdon struck Haven more favorably: “He has an intelligent countenance, a courteous manner, and speaks grammatically.” She judged him “by far the ablest and most cultivated of the Mormons,” an indirect comment on the little she knew about Joseph Smith.¹⁶

Haven’s reaction to Joseph Smith’s speech was unusual. No one called him a polished speaker, but most were impressed with his effectiveness. Parley Pratt said Joseph was “not polished—not studied—not smoothed and softened by education and refined by art,” and yet “he interested and edified, while, at the same time, he amused and entertained his audience; and none listened to him that were ever weary with his discourse.” His enemy Eber Howe, the antagonistic Painesville, Ohio, newspaper editor, granted that Joseph was “easy, rather fascinating and winning.”¹⁷ He had a great knack for the telling rejoinder when he came under verbal attack. A female preacher who came across Joseph in 1831 challenged him to swear in the presence of

God that an angel from heaven showed him the golden plates. Joseph replied gently, "I will not swear at all." She demanded, "Are you not ashamed of such pretensions? You, who are no more than an ignorant ploughboy of our land!" Joseph meekly said, "The gift has returned back again, as in former times, to illiterate fishermen."¹⁸

The comparison with Christ's illiterate fishermen may have summed up Joseph's idea about himself. He did not pretend to oratory and eloquence; fine speeches were left to Sidney Rigdon. Joseph thought of himself more as a plain person with a gift. If called upon, he could get a crowd to laugh, as he seems to have done in Charlotte Haven's hearing, but his tongue also gave forth the mysteries of godliness when he chose. Eliza R. Snow, a refined, graceful person herself who wrote poetry and taught a "select school" for young ladies, lived with the Smiths and watched Joseph's "'daily walk and conversation.'" She found that "his lips ever flowed with instruction and kindness," though capable of "severe rebuke" when moved to defend his people.¹⁹

"Gentleman" was not the word Josiah Quincy used to describe Joseph. Son of the Harvard College president and soon to be mayor of Boston himself, Quincy was a thoroughgoing Brahmin when he and Charles Francis Adams paid a call on Joseph Smith in May 1844. Quincy was not unattentive to the question of gentility. In the collection of sketches taken from his journal, Quincy preceded the account of his Nauvoo visit with the story of Andrew Jackson's visit to Boston to receive an honorary degree from Harvard while he was president of the United States. Quincy opened his sketch by rebutting the judgment common among Bostonians that "General Jackson was not what you would call a gentleman!" To the contrary, Quincy declared, "the seventh President was a knightly personage" and "vigorously a gentleman in his high sense of honor and in the natural straightforward courtesies which are easily to be distinguished from the veneer of policy." Quincy put forward this claim against the prevailing intolerance of Jackson by "the Brahmin caste of my native state."²⁰ Presumably, he had the nerve to say the same of Joseph, whom he greatly admired, had he seen gentlemanly qualities in the Prophet.

Instead he found another basis for his admiration. Joseph appeared to Quincy as a great vital force. He compared Joseph to the Rhode Island congressman, Elisha Potter, whom Quincy had met in Washington in 1826. The two of them, Quincy said, emanated "a certain peculiar moral stress and compulsion which I have never felt in the presence of others of their countrymen." Potter, a giant of a man in physical bulk,

had “wit and intelligence” in proportion to his size. Though not as large, Joseph left a similar impression. “Both were of commanding appearance, men whom it seemed natural to obey.” Potter carried about him “a surplus of vital energy, to relieve the wants of others”: “I well remember how the faces about Miss Hyer’s dining table were wont to be lighted up when he entered the room.” Quincy in passing spoke of Potter as “a gentleman,” a word he never applied to Joseph, but the impressive qualities of both of them had nothing to do with refinement.²¹

Quincy and Adams dropped in on Joseph Smith unannounced early one morning. Their steamboat had stopped at the Nauvoo landing after midnight, and they were about to continue upstream after they discovered there was no room at “General Smith’s tavern,” but a room was found in an old mill that had been converted into a house. They swept “a small army of cockroaches” from the coverlet and slept through night in their dressing gowns. The next morning after driving two muddy miles, they saw the Prophet by a three-story frame house surrounded by a white fence:

Preëminent among the stragglers by the door stood a man of commanding appearance, clad in the costume of a journeyman carpenter when about his work. He was a hearty, athletic fellow, with blue eyes standing prominently out upon his light complexion, a long nose, and a retreating forehead. He wore striped pantaloons, a linen jacket, which had not lately seen the washtub, and a beard of some three days’ growth. This was the founder of the religion which had been preached in every quarter of the earth.

While the incongruity of Joseph’s appearance and his religious pretensions struck Quincy as slightly humorous, it did not trouble Joseph. Later in the morning before he accompanied the two visitors on a tour of Nauvoo, Joseph changed into a broadcloth suit, but he had seen no need to dress up earlier to appear on the streets of the city. On this day, he had left off the white stock of the modern portraits and had not bothered to shave his face. The role of prophet, which he never stepped out of, did not require him to appear in the garb of a gentleman. Nor was he embarrassed when caught in undress by two finely attired visitors.

And yet his presence impressed Quincy. “A *fine-looking man* is what the passer-by would instinctively have murmured,” he said of the Prophet, “but Smith was more than this, . . . one could not resist the impression that capacity and resource were natural to his stalwart person.” Linking him to Potter again, Quincy observed that “of all men I

have met, these two seemed best endowed with that kingly faculty which directs, as by intrinsic right, the feeble or confused souls who are looking for guidance.” The comment reduced the Nauvoo Mormons to mixed-up weaklings but without devaluing Joseph’s character. Although disbelieving everything Joseph said and considering his comments “puerile,” Quincy could not resist “the impression of rugged power that was given by the man.”²²

Joseph did not come among his working-class followers as John Wesley did, appearing as an aristocrat with fine skin and smooth hair that awed and inspired common people. On an ordinary day, Joseph stepped out of his house in striped pantaloons, a dirty jacket, and a three days’ growth of beard. Nor did he reside in a splendid mansion. After getting by in a cramped log house for three years in Nauvoo, he moved into the Mansion House, where there was more space to entertain visitors.²³ Fenced with white pickets, as Quincy noted, and probably painted, the house was certainly well above the average Nauvoo residence and yet did not function as a mansion when Quincy and Adams visited. Sold to a tavern keeper in January 1844 to help with Joseph’s debts, the house did not have the amenities of a mansion on this particular day. As he set about to entertain his distinguished visitors, he was not able to usher them into a parlor where genteel people always entertained important guests; Joseph had to hunt for a space to even sit down.²⁴ Avoiding the “comfortless” barroom, Joseph opened one door occupied by a woman in bed, shut it, and ran upstairs to another room where three men were sleeping in three beds. The next room had two sleeping occupants, but “the third attempt was somewhat more fortunate, for we had found a room which held but a single bed and a single sleeper. . . . Our host immediately proceeded to the bed, and drew the clothes well over the head of its occupant. He then called a man to make a fire, and begged us to sit down.” Without embarrassment, Joseph then discoursed on the Church’s history and prospects.²⁵

The incident occurred a little over a month before the Prophet’s death. Nauvoo had grown into a large city, about as large as Chicago. Migrants were pouring in at a ferocious rate, and a huge temple was under construction on the bluff overlooking the town. Still, at this late date, Joseph could not entertain important visitors in a parlor, the essential architecture of a gentleman. He talked to them in his pantaloons, sitting in a bedroom next to a concealed (and likely startled) sleeper huddled under the covers. Much as they admired the Prophet’s

intelligence and personal force, Quincy and Adams could never write a report on Joseph Smith's refinement.

Joseph Smith himself recognized the incongruity and had taken strong measures to end it. Like Sidney Rigdon, he believed the Saints should show a polished face to the world. A January 1841 revelation commanded the Saints to build a hotel at the same time as the temple was going up, "that the weary traveler may find health and safety while he shall contemplate the word of the Lord" (D&C 124:23). Joseph put the case more bluntly when he later was pressing the city to step up its efforts. "There is no place in this city," he told a conference in April 1843, "where men of wealth, character and influence from abroad can go to repose themselves, and it is necessary we should have such a place."²⁶ He foresaw the arrival of figures like Quincy and Adams and knew they deserved better than a bed covered with cockroaches and a parlor shared with a covered sleeper. Lyman Wight and George Miller got busy in the summer of 1841 to raise money and bring down lumber from Wisconsin to raise the massive structure. The plans called for a three-story brick building composed of two wings, each 120 by 40 feet, enough space for seventy-five rooms plus a suite for Joseph and his family.²⁷

In the end, the hotel construction was more than the Saints could manage at the same time as the temple. The hotel was never completed, though not for want of effort on Joseph's part. He insisted the hotel was of equal importance with the temple, though sentiment was all against him. "The building of the Nauvoo House is just as sacred in my view as the Temple," he told the workers in February of 1843. "I want the Nauvoo House built. It *must* be built. Our salvation [as a city] depends upon it." As he put it, the Lord had commanded, "'Build a Temple to my great name, and call the attention of the great, the rich, and the noble.'" But when they came to see the temple, they would ask, "Where shall we lay our heads? In an old log cabin."²⁸ But the rhetoric was in vain. In the summer of 1843, the project was abandoned with the hotel only partly up, and the next May, Quincy and Adams had to stay in a shanty.

As a comment on the Mormon attitude toward gentility, the failed Nauvoo House made the point exactly. The large plan, the great effort, Joseph's pleadings with the workmen, all attested to his serious interest in presenting his people favorably. How else, as Sidney put it, "is Zion to become the joy and the praise of the whole earth." Nothing about the city or the Saints should bring shame to the work, moving Joseph to put the hotel, rhetorically at least, on a par with the

temple. But when resources ran out, Nauvoo House construction stopped while the Saints worked on the temple up to the last second before their departure, determined to complete it at any cost. Refinement and beauty were means to an end, not, like the temple, the greatest good itself.

Warren Cowdery stated the Mormon position in an 1837 essay on “Manners” in the *Messenger and Advocate*. “I make it a point of morality,” Cowdery wrote, “never to find fault with another for his manners. They may be awkward or graceful, blunt or polite, polished or rustic, I care not what they are if the man means well and acts from honest intentions.”²⁹ Joseph Smith would have endorsed those sentiments. He said that he loved a man better “who swears a stream as long as my arm yet deals justice to his neighbors and mercifully deals his substance to the poor, than the long, smooth-faced hypocrite.” He spoke of himself as “a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain,” polished only when it chipped off a corner by striking something.³⁰ John D. Lee, a rough-hewn man himself, said Joseph’s “countenance was that of a plain, honest man, full of benevolence and philanthropy and void of deceit or hypocrisy.”³¹

Joseph Smith’s hopes for elevating his people followed along the same line. He certainly did not want to leave them mired in vulgarity and coarseness. Jackson County frontiersmen shocked him in 1831 with their “degradation, leanness of intellect, ferocity, and jealousy”; he mourned for those “who roamed about without the benefit of civilization, refinement, or religion.”³² Joseph envisioned cultural development for the Saints but not exactly in terms of genteel polish. He used another vocabulary for the assembly that gathered in April 1841 to lay the foundation stones for the Nauvoo temple. The crowd’s demeanor lifted his spirits, because he heard no profane language and saw no intoxication:

We will say we never witnessed a more imposing spectacle than was presented on this occasion, and during the sessions of the conference. Such a multitude of people moving in harmony, in friendship, in dignity, told in a voice not easily misunderstood, that they were a people of intelligence, and virtue and order; in short, that they were *Saints*; and that the God of love, purity and light, was their God, their Exemplar, and Director; and that they were blessed and happy.³³

Those were Joseph’s words—intelligence, virtue, order, friendship. Nothing about dress, posture, fine manners, fashion. He was more interested in character than personality.

The refinement-in-the-wilderness histories of Utah then must be put in a broader context. Refinement there was most certainly, but more as a product of spreading middle-class gentility than as a result of Mormon teachings. In Mormon culture, refinement was more an aspect of hospitality and public relations than of religion itself. The campaign for gentility conducted in the pages of the *Woman's Exponent* in the 1870s was as much political as moral. Among the Mormons, the highest human ideal was not refinement. The grim bearded faces and gaunt female forms in Anderson's photographs were not incomplete Saints as the history of refinement implies. Joseph could have sat among them, dressed in workman's clothes, and chatted as comfortably as he talked with visiting Brahmins. He cared more that his people were honest and loyal, true to one another and their faith, than that they throw off gleams from a polished surface. If they slid their food into their mouths on a knife blade, he would not have objected. He never pretended to be a polished gentleman himself and valued a host of other qualities above good manners. From Liberty Jail in March 1839, he pled with the Saints for a reformation of everyone, "both old and young teachers and taught[t] both high and low rich and poor bond and free Male and female." What he wanted from them was something far simpler and more difficult than refined manners. "Let honesty and sobriety, and cander and solemnity, and virtue, and pureness, and meekness, and simplicity, Crown our heads in every place."³⁴ He would have asked the same of farm families in desert cabins and of well-dressed ladies and gentlemen on the streets of Salt Lake City.

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NOTES

1. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (New York: Howard Wilford Bell, 1904), 16, 19–20, 21–22, 25.

2. Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, vi, vii.

3. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 386–88.

4. Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past*, new edition (1883; Boston: Little, Brown, 1926), 229–30.

5. Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 184–85.

6. Quoted in Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 314, 317.

7. Quoted in Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 319.
8. Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 425–26.
9. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 4–5, 10–11, 29.
10. Sidney Rigdon, “The Saints and the World,” *Messenger and Advocate* 3 (December 1836): 421.
11. “Baptism—the Mode of Its Administration . . .,” *Times and Seasons* 4 (September 15, 1843): 321.
12. Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus, *They Knew the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), 173.
13. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 4:566 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).
14. Andrus and Andrus, *They Knew the Prophet*, 29.
15. Elizabeth Allen, *Sketches of Green Mountain Life; with an Autobiography of the Author* (Lowell, Mass.: Nathaniel L. Dayton, 1846).
16. William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 118–19, 120, 123.
17. Quoted in Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 103.
18. Quoted in Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 103–4.
19. Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith: Prophet’s Wife, “Elect Lady,” Polygamy’s Foe, 1804–1879* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 61.
20. Quincy, *Figures of the Past*, 296.
21. Quincy, *Figures of the Past*, 231–33.
22. Quincy, *Figures of the Past*, 320–22.
23. Robert Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 175.
24. A month later, John C. Calhoun Jr. visited Joseph in Nauvoo and was entertained in a “drawingroom.” Brian Q. Cannon, ed., “John C. Calhoun, Jr., Meets the Prophet Joseph Smith Shortly before the Departure for Carthage,” *BYU Studies* 33, no. 4 (1993): 777.
25. Quincy, *Figures of the Past*, 322.
26. *History of the Church*, 5:328.
27. Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 182–83.
28. *History of the Church*, 5:285.
29. Warren Cowdery, “Manners,” *Messenger and Advocate* 3 (February 1837): 463.
30. *History of the Church*, 5:401.
31. Quoted in Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 125.
32. *History of the Church*, 1:189.
33. *History of the Church*, 4:331.
34. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 397.